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Viewing cable 09ATHENS226, TURKISH EMBASSY'S VIEWS ON MIGRANT READMISSIONS

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- The top box shows each cables unique reference number, when and by whom it originally was sent, and what its initial classification was.
- The middle box contains the header information that is associated with the cable. It includes information about the receiver(s) as well as a general subject.
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Reference ID	Created	Released	Classification	Origin
09ATHENS226	2009-02-20 12:52	2011-08-30 01:44	CONFIDENTIAL	Embassy Athens

Appears in these articles:

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SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/11/2019
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PBTS](#) [PHUM](#) [PTER](#) [TU](#) [GR](#)
SUBJECT: TURKISH EMBASSY'S VIEWS ON MIGRANT READMISSIONS
FROM GREECE

REF: 08 ATHENS 1668

Classified By: DCM Deborah McCarthy for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

Summary

¶1. (C) According to an official at the Turkish Embassy in Athens, there are two reasons why Turkey is unwilling to permit Greece to return third-country illegal migrants to Turkey at the port of Izmir, as called for in a 2001 bilateral protocol and which the Greeks believe would greatly reduce the huge inflow of illegal migrants who use this route. The first reason is concern that Turkey cannot handle large numbers of additional illegals in a "tourist area." Second is concern that if Greece returns the migrants to Turkey too quickly and without adequate legal processing in Greece, it could "violate the migrants' rights." The official said the problem is likely to get worse, that Turkey did not want the burden, and that Turkey might have to pull out of the 2001 protocol if a better solution is not found. End Summary.

Yes If by Land, No If by Sea

¶2. (C) We met February 9 with Turkish Embassy Second Secretary Tolga Ucak, to follow up on readouts we had received from Greek officials about ongoing talks with Turkey to improve implementation of the 2001 protocol (reftel). The Greeks had expressed frustration that, despite the protocol, Turkey had never accepted return of more than a small number of migrants. The Greeks' preferred solution would be to open up Izmir -- one of three points in Turkey specified in the protocol -- for returns by sea, which would permit the Greek Coast Guard to handle the returns directly without having to go through a long and almost always unsuccessful bureaucratic procedure via Athens to return the migrants at the land border. According to the Greeks, their Turkish interlocutors responded that using Izmir was impossible for unspecified "security reasons." While this impasse has continued, the number of migrants using the Turkey-Greece route has skyrocketed over the past two years, with Greek authorities detaining 146,337 illegals in 2008, most of whom had transited Turkey. Leading countries of origin include Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia, and Pakistan.

¶3. (C) Ucak acknowledged that the protocol did identify Izmir port as a point for readmitting migrants, but he said that practical and human rights considerations made that impossible. On the practical side, he argued that Izmir was a "tourist area" that "could not support" a large additional number of detained migrants. He said Turkey was in the process of building new detention centers, but it did not have as many resources as Greece for this purpose. These concerns applied not only to Izmir but to any port on the Anatolian coast that might be considered for readmissions.

¶4. (C) Ucak also expressed concern that if Greece returned the migrants to Turkey too hastily, it might violate legal and human rights standards. There had to be some process to establish that the migrants had in fact entered Greece from Turkey, although he admitted that the protocol said circumstantial evidence could be sufficient. He also said there had to be a procedure in Greece to consider asylum claims by the migrants, or at least to give them a genuine opportunity to claim asylum. Greece had come under criticism from the EU and NGOs for its low rate of asylum request approvals. It would simply not be acceptable, Ucak said, for Greece to return the migrants to Turkey with little or no consideration of the individual cases.

¶5. (C) Ucak said Turkey genuinely wanted greater cooperation and burden sharing with Greece on migration issues, and he pointed to a bilateral Coast Guard visit exchange program as one example of progress. He acknowledged that the problem of migrants transiting Turkey and Greece was getting worse, and he expressed concern that there may be another large increase in summer 2009. When pressed, he admitted that Turkey -- like other countries on the migration route -- did not want the burden of being responsible for migrants who could neither go back to their home countries nor onward to the next destination. He added that Turkey would oppose the EU getting involved in border enforcement in the region, especially in the Aegean, which has long been a source of

contention between Turkey and Greece. Given the unworkability of readmissions by sea, Ucak said, it would probably be necessary to re-negotiate the 2001 protocol. If this was impossible, he added, Turkey might at some point withdraw from the protocol unilaterally.

Comment

16. (C) In our view Turkey and Greece need to engage in more vigorous discussions on the 2001 potocol to address the massive flow of immigrants coming through Turkey to Greece. The Turkish Embassy's comments about the effects on tourism in Izmir and the need for Greece to take action on asylum cases for people who first transit through Turkey appear to us to be efforts to toss this hot potato. Last but not least the comment on Turkish reaction to EU assistance to the problem is troubling as Greece is reaching out to the EU for assistance in handling the large flow of immigrants. We recognize that Greece has not acted as strongly as it could to prevent aliens from moving on to the next destination (usually Italy) or moved as quickly as it could to enter the aliens' fingerprints in the EU's EURODAC electronic database to identify them as having entered Europe in Greece. We will work with EU colleagues here to encourage the Greeks to do so. We will also encourage them to continue efforts with the GOT to make the 2001 protocol more workable, and would welcome Embassy Ankara's thoughts on how to do so.
SPECKHARD